



SHARP FACTS

Unplanned Pregnancy Prevention: An Emergency Option



Why is Family Planning Important?

In the United States, only half of pregnancies are planned at the time of conception. For some of these unplanned pregnancies, the women would prefer to get pregnant later; others do not desire pregnancy at all. About one half of unplanned pregnancies end in an induced abortion. Among active duty enlisted female Sailors who became pregnant in 1997, approximately 60% of pregnancies were unplanned. About half of these women were not using any form of birth control. Unplanned pregnancies are also associated with more problems for the mother and infant than planned pregnancies. Women with unplanned pregnancies cannot take advantage of preconception care, a special healthcare visit that helps the women achieve the healthiest possible pregnancy outcome. Planning to become pregnant at a time when a woman is healthy and ready to become a parent can maximize the health and opportunities for women, children and families.

What is the most effective method of birth control?

Only abstinence (not having sex) is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. Methods that are highly effective are birth control pills, hormone injections, Norplant® inserts, IUDs (intrauterine devices) and sterilization (vasectomy and tubal ligation). Methods that can be effective when used correctly are the diaphragm, condoms, and spermicides (foam), cervical cap and rhythm (natural family planning).

What can a woman do to prevent pregnancy if she has unprotected sex?

If a woman has had intercourse without using birth control or if something happened (such as a condom broke), she can use emergency contraception **up to 72 hours after** unprotected sex. She should call her health care provider or family planning clinic as soon as possible for the dosage and timing of the pills. As with all birth control methods, this does not prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

Facts about emergency contraceptives

A variety of oral contraceptive therapies are available for use as emergency contraception. Also, two emergency contraceptive pill products have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in preventing pregnancy after intercourse when barrier contraceptives have failed or when no contraceptives were used at all. One product contains the hormones progestin and estrogen; the other contains just progestin. EC pills are available by prescription only in most states. They may be purchased without a prescription in California, Washington and Alaska. Both products are believed to work by delaying or inhibiting ovulation, or by keeping a fertilized egg from implanting in the uterine wall. These pills are not effective once the fertilized egg has implanted.

Emergency contraceptives:

- do **not** protect against sexually transmitted diseases
- are **not** intended for frequent use
- should **not** be taken *before* unprotected sex
- are **not** recommended over other more effective contraceptive methods

How effective are emergency contraceptives?

Emergency contraceptives are about 75 percent effective, which means the number of women who would be expected to become pregnant after unprotected sex drops from eight out of 100 without any contraception to two out of 100 when an emergency contraceptive is used.

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What will happen when I take emergency contraceptive pills?

Side effects include nausea and vomiting, both of which were reported less frequently in women taking the progestin-only pills.

Is emergency contraception the same as the "morning after pill"?

The words "morning after" are misleading, because emergency contraceptive pills can be used up to 72 hours after sex, not just the next morning. However, it is more effective the sooner it is taken, and it's most effective during the first 24 hours.

Is emergency contraception the same as RU-486, the "abortion pill"?

No. RU-486 (the "abortion pill") and emergency contraceptive pills are completely different. Emergency contraceptive pills work the same way birth control pills do — they can prevent a pregnancy from starting. RU-486 will actually induce an abortion after a woman has conceived instead of preventing conception. The FDA has stated that there is no evidence that emergency contraceptive pills will have an adverse effect on an established pregnancy.

Is emergency contraception new?

No, emergency contraceptive therapy has been known and used for over 20 years.

What family planning services are available through the Navy?

Counseling and information

BUMED Instruction 6300.9 directs Naval medical facilities, including facilities on board naval vessels, to provide (or authorizes them to provide referral to) family planning services. Also, MANMED Article 15-76 provides annual health maintenance examination requirements for all active duty women which includes family planning, contraceptive counseling, and STD prevention counseling. Counseling should include information on availability and effectiveness of birth control methods (including emergency contraception).

Emergency Contraceptives

Emergency contraception pills are available by prescription from your health care provider.

Where can I get more information?

For detailed information, counseling, and access to birth control options, contact your health care provider. For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

This information was adapted by the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), Directorate of Health Promotion and Population Health, Navy Environmental Health Center from Protecting Against Unintended Pregnancy: A Guide to Contraceptive Choices, U.S. Food and Drug Administration (June 2000); BUMEDINST 6300.9 Family Planning Services (5 Sep 1990); MANMED Article 15-76, Annual Health Maintenance Examination Recommendations for Active Duty Members; Pregnancy and Single Parenthood in the Navy: Results of a 1997 Survey, TR-98-6, Navy Personnel Research and Development Center (Sep 1998); and material developed by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc.